

CLAUDE GÉVEL

THE BLIND MAN AND THE PARALYTIC

THE LIVING AGE

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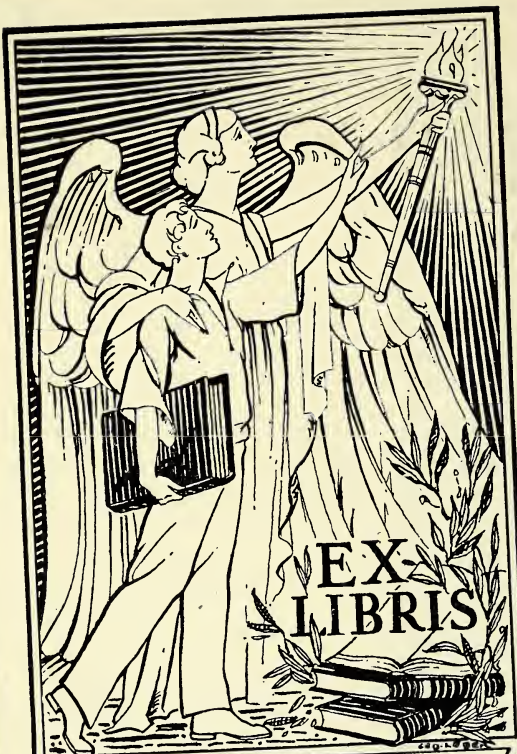
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paradise of the National Gallery, all the great sculptors and all the great authors, a majestic congregation in the British Museum. Why, it is a pleasure, when walking along Adelphi Terrace, to feel 'Bernard Shaw lives there,' even though he is not to be seen at the window.

It is a pleasure, too, to enjoy the art of the day by proximity and to know that somewhere or other the pictures of Mr. Augustus John and Mr. Henry Lamb and Mr. Nevinson are being exhibited, though the show is usually over before one has had time to go to it. And it is a pleasure to be contem-

porary with Mr. Arnold Bax and Mr. Arthur Bliss and to live in a constant anticipation of hearing their work otherwise than through one's admirable representative, the regular concertgoer.

The pleasures of proximity have never yet had justice done to them. It is chiefly they, however, that make London so much more desirable a city to live in than Birmingham or Manchester. It is because they mean so much to us that, if the British Museum or National Gallery were burned down, we should regard it not only as a public calamity but as one of the great personal calamities of our lives.

THE LIVING AGE

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THE BLIND MAN AND THE PARALYTIC

BY CLAUDE GÉVEL

From *Le Mercure de France*, March 1
(CLERICAL CONSERVATIVE SEMIMONTHLY)

THE whole countryside had known this strange pair for many years — these two creatures who were but a single being. One of them carried the other, who, in turn, guided their path through the streets of the little town, through the countryside and the suburbs. They lived happily, owing their happiness to common misfortunes.

They had no need to beg for alms. The burgher, whom they passed under the arcades in the rue des Tanneurs, would put his hand in his pocket and give them a few sous without being asked. At the gates of the town, the sentinels, from their deep niches in the wall, would signal to the men-at-arms: and from the smoky sentry-box, as they passed, they would be given scraps of food and sometimes a bowl of

spiced wine along with rough pleasures. They had their calling day at the castle and at each of the surrounding farmhouses, just like the parish priest. They would find their corner in the barn well provided with straw, and, in the steaming iron cauldron, thick soup to regale them. Never did a wagon on the road fail to stop and pick them up, saving them part of their journey; and when it started on its heavy way it seemed to bow beneath the weight of some fantastic scarecrow.

Above all else they found a marvelous pleasure in their enforced friendship — the blind man's shoulders were accustomed to their daily burden. He walked along erect at an even pace. A word from the paralytic would bring sight to his sealed eyes.

In this way, he could appreciate the beauty of the church that had been built in the Place du Rosaire on the site of the one that had been destroyed by a thunderbolt a century ago; he saw the tower, with three variously sculptured balustrades, rearing itself, and the clock, shaped like a mitre, standing out in relief against the west portal, where on the shady side new scenes from the Old Testament came to life every day, and on the sunny side scenes of the Passion shone forth in the gold and red and violet colors of the stained-glass windows that told the legendary tale of the life of Saint Mary of Egypt; he knew how sumptuous a house the great cloth-merchant Clément, enriched by his commerce with the Indies, had built, with its little out-house of wrought iron, with its windows decorated with gross episodes taken from some of the farces famous in that district; he admired the sundial on the first story, in which the pleasant device, 'Ora pro nobis,' was inscribed in letters of gold, and on which delicately wrought statues of women were sculptured, each of whom held, in the supple folds of her garments, a charming symbol of the master of the house: a comb, a shuttle, or a brush to give brilliant lustre to a roll of cloth.

The paralytic also described to him the splendor of the earth, whose hues are more varied and changeable than the songs of the birds; the curious shape of the trees, and the long ribbon of silver or gold or of the color of the sky that the tranquil stream traced along beside them, hour by hour.

There was only one discordant subject between the two: each one pretended to be the less useful member of their association. They disputed the subject endlessly, both as firmly convinced as two people always are who do not know what they are talking about. Through shame, the paralytic

affected not to prize beyond all measure the joy of seeing; and the blind man would never mention his fatigue. The paralytic was always the first to propose calling a halt, and, for fear of becoming too heavy a load, he never ate his fill without reproaching himself.

One day a rumor passed through the town. The arrival was announced of a man named Martin, the fame of whose saintliness and virtue went before him. Forgetful of himself, he would give his bread to the poor and share his own clothes with them. When he fell into the hands of brigands, one night in the Alps, his ardent faith entirely converted them; he had unmasked the spirit of a false martyr whom people worshiped; he had put out a fire, appearing in its very flames; a falling pine had swerved as it crashed to earth in order not to crush him; animals obeyed his voice. Recently a new power had been revealed in him: simply by laying on his hands, he could cure disease.

From all over the country came lepers, lame people, men stricken with fever, paralytics, mothers carrying their children and children leading their mothers, old men covered with sores, men and women with grotesque deformities, rich and poor, indistinguishable because of similar infirmities, good men and bad joined together by their shameful sickness, running to demand and to praise the miracle that was theirs by right. And, on contact with Martin, the sores healed up, blood ran more vigorously and pure under the skin, lame men walked, blind men suddenly saw the night that had enveloped all their world fall away.

The little town, suddenly overrun by all this human misery, exalted by all these hopes, embellished with all this joy, was soon transformed into a great court of miracles.

Silently the days began, with the offering up of prayers. Then, in an

instant, the bewildered clamor for acts of grace, rising to a vociferous pitch as if each person wanted to attract divine attention by shouting louder than anyone else. But among the crowd that was crushed into the outer court of the church, in the procession that pressed close on the footsteps of the holy man, Martin, among those who fought for the privilege of kissing the ground that his foot had just trod, fighting to seize furtively the hem of his patched garment, never did the deformed creature appear that carried two heads and two bodies on a single pair of legs.

Only at night, when all the town slept, did their fantastic shadow trace itself between the pillars of the arcade and along the walls that it skirted. During the day, a few people saw them making their way down obscure, deserted alleys, or, beyond the gates, plunging into barren ravines and entering the forest. The blind man and the paralytic fled the maker of miracles.

Concealed in little hovels, sheltered in heavy thickets, they shook with terror: the hope of others was their fear.

'This Martin,' said the blind man, 'can turn our life upside down.'

'Alas,' said the paralytic, 'if he meets us, our tranquil happiness is over, our care-free existence, perhaps our friendship. You will see; undoubtedly I shall walk very well! Have n't I seen for you, and have n't you done my walking?'

'We should no longer be interesting.'

'Who will give us the means of earning our bread right away?'

'Shall we be reduced, like Basile, to asking for alms at the church door?' added the paralytic, scornfully.

'This Martin,' continued the blind man, 'has never stirred my sympathy: it was he whom we met last year, and who gave us half of his cloak, a gift that was almost useless to us. He took

good care not to give us all of it; he could not have made an exhibition of his good deed; and all winter, it appears, he carried half of that rag about with him.'

In this fashion they conversed, exiled, ungrateful because of their fear.

Soon they had to leave the retreats where they had hidden themselves: they had to do something else to remain alive. At daybreak or nightfall they went along unfrequented roads, along streets that were seldom used, the blind man muffling his footsteps, the paralytic looking keenly about, both on the watch for any sound, so they might avoid the man who would bestow on them a happiness that they did not want. For they were such sincere and pious believers that they did not question the miracle, even if they feared it; they deserved it just like the woman with the issue of blood and the daughter of Jairus, and the two blind men, and all the people whom Jesus had cured, simply because they firmly believed in Him.

But their hosts from whom they received their substance were astonished at their obstinacy in refusing to seek a cure. They invented pretexts, thought up subterfuges. They did not, however, think of saying that divine grace had not found them worthy; their piety and a kind of self-respect forbade their telling this sacrilegious lie. And people did not understand why a blind man refused to see and a lame man refused to walk.

It was Corpus Christi Sunday. Even in ordinary times the town would be decked out with oriflammes and draperies that hung from balconies and terraces, framed themselves about the windows, twined among the pillars of the arcades, and even fell on the sharp stones of the street. The town over-

flowed with flowers that formed a setting for the holy statues that were placed on every tablet, on the cornices, on the pilasters, and in the gutters running under the windows; at every corner there was an altar surrounded with plants, weighed down with jewelry, hung with garlands, covered with rich materials, delicate embroidery, and old lace, all of which was approached by thick carpets and precious cushions, simply thrown on the bare ground.

In this miraculous year, the fête had to take on an even greater splendor than ever before: people rivaled each other with even more spirit than usual in offering wealth, ransacking coffers, laying gardens to waste. The statues on the altars glistened with sparkling gems; the air was heavy with the scent of lilacs and roses; the pavements of the streets where the procession was to pass disappeared under the velvet, the tapestries, and brocades that traced a pathway of gold.

Shortly after daybreak, the blind man and the paralytic wanted to get into the country; but the armed men at the main gates prevented them from passing. As they knew that the other doors and posterns were shut, they came back to seek refuge in the most deserted corners and the most remote parts of the town. In vain — everywhere there was someone who cried out to them to join the procession. It was as if an order had been given to hunt them down. They did not stop; they retraced their steps; they made use of every detour; they tried every hiding-place they knew. They felt that they were being followed, that their footsteps were being dogged; they made the circuit of the town; then they traversed every district of it; they skirted the banks of stagnant canals, and climbed up the five hundred and twenty steps of an old belfry, hoping

to find their coveted solitude in its tower.

In vain — the bellman overtook them and forced them to go down. Then they thought that perhaps the wisest thing would be to glide along in the crowd, to remain ignored there among the pilgrims, the strangers in the country who were now more numerous than ever.

The blind man and the paralytic sought out the great streets, mixing in with groups of people, trying to lose themselves in the multitude with which they flowed. In vain — they are no longer masters of themselves; they are carried and shoved by the people who surround them; they go forward more rapidly in spite of themselves; they gain on the rest of the mob. 'Not so fast,' murmurs the paralytic to the blind man; but the blind man cannot stop. He shakes with exhaustion; sweat streams down his face; he feels himself being consciously thrust along by the crowd, perhaps by a more mysterious force, too.

They have now arrived at the foremost rank in the open space before the church. The bells sound, the huge portal opens and lets out red and white angels whose banners are their wings, children whose high singing pierces the tumult, priests clothed in robes of lace with their hands folded across their chests, the bishop, dressed in violet under his canopy of garnet-hued velvet, indifferent to this fête at which he is not the great personage. Last of all, Martin, the holy man, clothed in black.

Then a spontaneous increasing clamor rises from the people: 'A miracle! A miracle!' Martin stretches out his hands; he has paused at the top of the church steps which, together with the dome over the portal, make a marvelous throne of stone. Everybody is silent. From the kneeling mass emerges the blind man, surmounted by

the paralytic, and their silhouette seems to stand out alone before the maker of miracles.

Martin murmurs a prayer and his voice comes back to him: 'Thou who wert blind, see, and thou, walk, who wert lame.'

And behold, the blind man passes his hand across his eyes, the paralytic slides from the shoulders that had carried him for so long a time; both men fall on their knees, side by side. Then two sobs are heard; the blind man and the paralytic weep, prostrate on the ground.

The noise of the bells, which again broke forth, drowned out the sound of the Alleluia, intoned by a thousand voices. The procession took shape: en-

vious and meditative it marched past the blind man and the paralytic, cured of the infirmity in which they had taken such pleasure. The singing died out, the bells were still. The two men rose to their feet: the blind man was not yet able to see clearly, the paralytic did not know how to walk very well. Both of them held out their hands toward the street down which the procession had disappeared; then, taking each other by the arm to find their way together for the last time in their lives, they bent their footsteps toward the gate of the town. When they had passed through it, without exchanging a word they clasped hands for a long time, and, taking opposite paths, they walked away.

BALZAC AND HIS PROVINCE

BY GERARD BAUËR

From *L'Écho de Paris*, February 15

(CLERICAL DAILY)

HUMAN relationships are determined by the natural course of life. Nothing could be simpler. Generation follows generation from father to son. Men marry and found families. But even the simplest thing here below is wrapped in mystery. A long line of peasant ancestors blossoms suddenly in the genius of Pasteur; another line of peasants rises suddenly to the heights of literature in Balzac. What secret alchemy of physical forces determines these intellectual marvels? What slow deposits create, when a certain point is reached, these supermen?

How gladly one would know the

secret of nature's workshop! One follows the stream to its source in order to see the quality of the water and the force with which it bursts from the soil. One hopes to find other places where the banks are already large and beautiful — places that in some measure indicate the greatness that is to come. These quests of minute examination into the origins of a great mind which one admires have a fascination that is peculiar to themselves.

For ten years M. Louis Lumet has been studying the origin of Honoré de Balzac with the enthusiasm of an ardent and thoroughgoing explorer. He has searched everywhere — the

country, the archives, the memories of people. And he comes back with his hands full of documents, his eyes full of landscapes, and his memory crammed with names. His interest in the subject has re-created for us the whole long series of Balzac's ancestors so far back that we reach the horizon of time where the eye can perceive nothing save gray and nameless shadows. What a journey it has been for him and for one who loves Balzac and has long loved him; what a delight it is to seek out these rude ancestors whose blood was one day to give life to a magnificent brain!

The Balzac family is a veritable forest of human beings, among whom the traveler loses his way. It is well-known that Balzac's father, Bernard-François Balssa, had claims to nobility, and that he declared himself to spring from the same stock as the noble family that bears the name of the village of Balsac, situated about two hours' travel from Brioude, whose original ancestors were the famous family, Balzac d'Entragues. Balzac himself speaks of these pretensions in the introduction to *Le Lys dans la vallée*: 'I am not a *gentilhomme* in the historical and genealogical sense of the word, which is so profoundly significant for the families of the conquering race. In saying this I set my pride against their pride, for my father boasted of coming from the conquered stock of a family who had resisted the invasion of Auvergne, and from whom the Entragues family sprang.'

Was Balzac of noble blood? In spite of his disclaimer, the great writer liked to think he was, as we can see clearly enough because he very early changed his name to Balzac; but M. Louis Lumet does not believe it. He thinks that the Balssa family had an origin quite different, springing from a plebeian family who, under the pressure

of a barbarian invasion, or perhaps through famine or pestilence, had come down from Auvergne to the plateau of Albigeois. They were fleeing from misfortune; they had hastily abandoned the village whose name they all bore, and when they were asked their name in the countries through which they journeyed they replied, '*Nous sommes les Balsac*,' or '*les Balssa*,' and they called their wives *Balsan* or *Balssanne*. The greater part of this fugitive company established themselves in the northern part of Albigeois and occupied themselves with the heavy work of cultivating the soil, until from this low estate they found their way upward into the lower clergy. M. Lumet presents them as a sturdy race, hairy, bony, and vigorous, fighting against rebellious nature a battle always difficult, and sometimes disastrous.

'From their misfortunes,' he writes, 'which often led to epidemic or to famine, they emerged all the hardier and the tougher; and, although racked with hunger or tortured by fever, they continued to scratch the earth of their *ségalas* with their primitive ploughs, tireless and submissive to fate. All their lives, all their activities, were concentrated on getting land, for he who wins land for himself has already won liberty. They were an earthy race from first to last — and still others follow them.'

Keep this picture in mind, if you care for Balzac, and ponder on it. Here in the distant past you will find the explanation of the author's chief characteristics — his feeling for tradition, and the soberness with which he regarded the social institutions. The peasant is a serf and a conservative by temperament. The changeless laws of nature, the rigid regularity of the season, the fruitfulness of the earth rule his life. It is the spirit of the

